Theorizing the political relevance of international relations theory

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Abstract

Two broad positions - the 'gap-bridgers' and the 'gap-minders' - dominate the current debate on the (lack of) political relevance of International Relations (IR) theory. Missing from this debate, however, is a broader theoretical framework that allows us to move beyond their disagreements. Hence, this article provides a theoretical account of the relationship between politics and knowledge. It shows that in the modern context scientific knowledge achieves political relevance by distancing itself, through theorizing, from the particularities of politics. This paradoxical relationship gives rise to three different dimensions of political relevance at different levels of abstraction. Metatheory plays a crucial role in constituting the modern conception of politics; theories establish concrete political spaces; and empirical studies can influence specific policies. Taking this context into account, moreover, calls for a reassessment of core features of the discipline: its poverty, fragmentation, and immaturity are common to all modern sciences; they function as a driver of scientific progress; and metatheoretical debates address the political dimension of the modern sciences. Hence, the source of IR's political relevance lies in its theoretical foundations. Abandoning theory in favor of policy oriented studies would simultaneously undermine the discipline's policy relevance and its standing as a modern science.

Introduction

The claim that the discipline of IR fails to live up to its core vocation to produce politically relevant work is not new (for example, Wallace 1996). Today, however, this claim is repeated and discussed in mainstream and social media (Kristof 2014)

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and informs research funding policies (Bastow, Dunleavy and Tinkler 2014:144; Desch 2015:379). The issue is thus of crucial importance for the discipline[2] and has given rise to a lively debate.

While the goal of producing politically relevant knowledge is widely shared among IR scholars, the meaning of this term and the means to achieve it are highly contested. Two broad positions have materialized. The 'gap-bridgers' (Parks and Stern 2014:76) hold that much of IR scholarship, both mainstream and critical, is politically irrelevant - largely because it focuses on theoretical and metatheoretical problems of little concern and use to political actors. Political relevance is here understood as *policy* relevance and leads to a call for more policy oriented studies in order to bridge the widening gap between theory and practice (Avey and Desch 2014:228; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013:448; Kurki 2011:130-1; Lowenthal and Bertucci 2014:1). In contrast, the 'gap-minders' point to varied forms of interaction between politics and academia that require a wider conception of *political* relevance. They show that theoretical work plays an important political role in its own right and argue that maintaining a distance between politics and academia is a precondition for political relevance (Eriksson 2014:99; Bertucci, Borges-Herrero and Fuentes-Julio 2014:66; Reus-Smit 2012; Zambernardi 2016).

Since the tensions between these positions arise from different conceptions of political relevance, moving the debate forward requires a theorization of that term. What this article provides, therefore, is a theoretical account of the modern relationship between politics and knowledge - and hence an encompassing conception of political relevance. The modern sciences, I will show, historically emerged in response to particular political problems and address these through their very separation from politics - that is, through a process of abstraction that provided scientific knowledge with an aura of objectivity and political neutrality. This abstraction from the particularity of politics distinguishes scientific from other forms of knowledge and provides it with its own peculiar form of political relevance. This process of abstraction is achieved through theorization and its reconstruction thus

[2] For the political and social sciences more generally, see Bastow et al. (2014), Stoker, Peters and Pierre, eds. (2015), Shapiro, Smith, and Masoud, eds. (2004).

highlights the janus-faced role of theory in providing the link between politics and knowledge on the one hand and their constitution as separate spheres on the other. Theory, I will show, is indispensable both for the *political* relevance of IR scholarship and for its *scientific* operation.

The process of separating politics and knowledge entails three different levels of abstraction, each simultaneously constituting one dimension of politics and of science. Metatheoretical work strives to abstract knowledge from particular political interests. It thus provides the basis for the modern conception of science as the application of universal reason to the nature of things - and of modern politics as the organization of society in accordance with that nature. Theories, meanwhile, provide an account of the relationship between phenomena like states, classes, individuals, genders, firms, norms, cultures, resources and thus establish particular fields of knowledge that simultaneously provide spaces for political contestation. Empirical studies, finally, offer insights into particular issues and events and hence also the means to shape respective policies.

This account suggests that IR scholarship is politically relevant at all three levels of abstraction. It also shows, however, that politics and knowledge are, paradoxically, most intimately linked at the metatheoretical level which provides the common ground for their separate constitution. From there, with every step towards concrete policies the gap widens. Hence, metatheoretical work plays a more fundamental political role than theories, and these in turn are of wider political relevance than empirical or policy oriented studies - a finding that vindicates and extends the position of the 'gap-minders'.

Moreover, identifying the co-constitutive role of politics and science in the modern era throws new light on the nature and function of IR as a modern science. It shows that metatheoretical debates establish and reproduce the very possibility of the modern sciences - in direct relation to politics. The ups and downs of metatheoretical debate thus reflect the dynamic and ongoing process of separating politics and science rather than indicating an 'end of theory' (Dunne, Hansen and Wight 2013). Moreover, while theoretical fragmentation does indicate the limitations of modern science in general, within that context it provides the driving force of knowledge development.

Scientific progress, in IR and elsewhere, is thus not linear and cumulative but takes the form of theoretical pluralism. And these metatheoretical and theoretical foundations, finally, provide empirical studies with the potential for *political* rather than just *policy* relevance. Abandoning theory in favor of policy oriented studies thus runs the risk of undermining not only the discipline's political relevance but also its scientific standing. The question IR scholars face is therefore not *whether* but *how* to theorize.

This study shows, in sum, that in the modern context, the gap between politics and knowledge functions as the bridge between them. Ensuring the political relevance of IR scholarship therefore indeed requires 'minding the gap'. More profoundly, however, it draws attention to the fundamental ways in which IR already is, and always has been, complicit in ordering politics. And this radically alters the nature of our political responsibilities - which lie to a considerable extent in recognizing, reflecting on, and taking responsibility for the political relevance of our theoretical work.

I will develop this argument in five steps. The next section analyzes the debate on political relevance and shows that although the two dominant positions identify some aspects of political relevance, neither develops a theoretical framework that grasps the whole. In order to address this lacuna, following an archeological approach, the second section provides a general account of the relationship between modern politics and knowledge and hence the framework for a conception of political relevance. Sections three, four, and five then explore the three different dimensions of political relevance - the framing of the modern conception of politics, the constitution of concrete political spaces, and the shaping of policies - and show that IR studies participate in, and contribute to, all of them.

Analyzing the debate on political relevance

The debate on political relevance involves a wide variety of views and issues. It is nevertheless possible to identify two broad positions. The first, the 'gap bridgers', largely conceive political relevance as *policy* relevance while the second, the 'gap minders' (Parks and Stern 2014:76), call for a wider conception of *political* relevance. Both present plausible arguments and empirical evidence. Yet moving beyond their

disagreements requires, I will argue, a theoretical account of political relevance itself that is currently missing from this debate.

Many IR studies fail to inform concrete policies (de Felice and Obino 2012; Lepgold and Nincic 2001). This is so, the 'gap-bridgers' argue, because IR research frequently fails to meet the three core criteria for policy relevant work. First, such work must engage with 'empirical realities' (Jentleson 2002:170), 'speak to concrete issues of policy and practice' (Sil and Katzenstein 2010:412), bear on 'real-world political developments' (Kurki 2011:131), be concerned with 'people' rather than 'abstract ideological commitments' (Sylvester 2013:615), metatheoretical debates (Chernoff 2009:157; Kurki 2011:130), or methodological reflections and exercises (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013:431; Avey and Desch 2014:228). Second, policy relevance is often thought to increase with the quality of scholarship, with the 'confidence' and certainty of our knowledge (Frieden and Lake 2005:137), with the accuracy of our theories (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013:433-4). Third, if academic studies and findings are to be policy relevant they need to be communicated in 'plain language' that is accessible to political actors (Nye 2008:655, 658).

The failure to meet these requirements is traced back to characteristics of academia in general and the discipline of IR in particular. Academia has 'fostered a culture that glorifies arcane unintelligibility while disdaining impact and audience' which is then 'transmitted to the next generation through the publish-or-perish tenure process' (Kristof 2014). In addition, three specific characteristics of IR contribute to policy irrelevance. First, the discipline suffers from the 'intellectual and moral poverty' of its subject matter - the international - that is conceived as 'inhospitable' to the pursuit of the good life (Hoffmann 1987:405; Wight 1966:20, 26; Waltz 1979:69). Second, IR is hampered by its internal fragmentation which implies that 'we do not even agree on what to discuss any more' (Waever 2007:288), on what is, or is not, relevant, let alone on how best to address such issues. Third, where the production of knowledge is seen as 'evolutionary' or 'cumulative' (Nau 2008:640-1; Frieden and Lake 2005:137, 145), the relative youth of the discipline implies that the 'emerging science of international relations has a long way to go before it can be of direct use to policy makers' (Frieden and Lake 2005:151).

And yet, this conception of policy relevance based on empirical groundedness, quality, and intelligibility does not necessarily describe the academic work that *has* played a political role. Highly abstract conceptions like *homo oeconomicus* - the rational profit-maximising individual - are used by every politician who promises a particular constituency tax breaks or benefits. Grand theories like liberalism and realism or prescriptive notions like the responsibility to protect have been politically influential (Eriksson 2014:99; Bertucci et al. 2014:62). Similarly, poor quality does not necessarily disqualify scholarship from policy relevance. Despite their shortcomings, the 'democratic peace thesis' or the 'clash of civilizations' played an important political role (Frieden and Lake 2005:142-3; Avey and Desch 2014:233; Eriksson 2014:97). Finally, while policymakers in general express a preference for qualitative over quantitative studies and hence a language that is accessible to non-academics, they nevertheless tolerate the latter in some disciplines like economics and statistics (Avey and Desch 2014:232). In short, while academic work that has been policy relevant sometimes meets one or more of these criteria, it often does not.

Moreover, as critics point out, this conception of policy relevance fails to account for all the cases in which IR research is not taken up by political actors despite the fact that it meets these criteria. Hence, many scholars address concrete political problems, undergo training and establish institutions with the specific aim to enhance the dissemination of their work to nonacademic audiences in general and policymakers in particular (Skocpol, Mettler, Jacobs and Hacker 2014). Such engagement, especially through social media, may actually have increased in recent years (Goldman 2014; Voeten 2014). This evidence draws attention to the fact that the relationship between knowledge and politics is not a one-way-street on which scientific truths travel to policymakers who translate them into practice (Eriksson 2014:95). Instead, influence also flows in the opposite direction, from politics to academia, through funding priorities (Eriksson 2014:97), gatekeeping, and the selective take-up of academic studies (Senchyne 2014; Voeten 2014; Duquette 2014). After all, 'as any political scientist knows, theory and evidence will never trump politics' but are invoked by political actors 'only when it serves their purposes' (Frieden and Lake 2005:151-2; Nye 2008:654; Brown 2013:492; Reed 2014; Bertucci et al. 2014:62). Critics hence argue for a wider conception of *political* relevance that 'is not reducible to *instrumental* considerations aimed at modifying or (...) changing the substance of a

given policy' (Bertucci et al. 2014:61; Eriksson 2014:95, 96) but includes 'potentially useful scholarship' (Reed 2014; Voeten 2015:402).

In addition, politically relevant knowledge often does not entail any specific policy advice. It includes grand theories, ideologies, world views, prescriptive ideas that cover a wide range of functions: from the analysis and formulation of specific policies through the legitimation and substantiation of particular institutions to providing 'concepts and generalizations that facilitate analysis of problems and policies' (Eriksson 2014:101; Bertucci et al. 2014:61). The concept of political relevance thus needs to be wide enough to account for different types of knowledge and their political functions (Eriksson 2014:99; Bertucci et al. 2014:62). Moreover, it can be argued that 'grand theory has a more fundamentally paradigmatic power than any mid-range or low-level theory' (Eriksson 2014:102) and is, hence, politically more relevant than policy oriented studies.

Finally, not only can 'bad' quality scholarship become politically relevant but, conversely, 'bad' policies - imperialism, slavery, racism, euthanasia, war - have been systematically supported by scientific theories (see, for example, Vitalis 2015). Indeed, it may be difficult to find any policy, good or bad, that is not supported by academic studies. This highlights the fact that 'the conventional conception of political relevance confuses relevance with improvement' (Eriksson 2014:97; Voeten 2015:402). Yet, 'improvement is a normative issue' (Eriksson 2014:97) and scientific methods are not equipped to identify the 'right' norms (Weber 1948:147). For this reason, an interest in improvement may actually require the 'minding' rather than the 'bridging' of the gap between politics and academia (Reus-Smit 2012; Zambernardi 2016).

Instead of depicting the relationship between politics and academia as an ever widening chasm, this position conjures up the picture of a rather busy thoroughfare, populated by a wide range of actors, on which knowledge and power are constantly traveling back and forth in a myriad of different forms. And rather than advocating policy oriented studies it suggests that improving politics requires theoretical work. There are, then, not just tensions between these two conceptions of political relevance (I will adopt the term political relevance henceforth as encompassing *policy*

relevance, unless otherwise indicated) but also considerable disagreements regarding their political implications.

These disagreements arise from the use of two different conceptions of political relevance. The 'gap-bridgers' derive theirs from the explicit or assumed needs of political actors while that of the 'gap-minders' is based on a broader survey of interactions between politics and academia. In the absence of a theoretical framework that allows us to identify relevant empirical fields, however, any number of competing conceptions of political relevance can be derived from different empirical bases. Confronted with different types of political relevance, moreover, we lack the means to assess their relative weight. And, finally, failure to specify what counts as 'political' or 'knowledge' risks leading to a conception of political relevance that covers 'everything' and consequently illuminates 'nothing'.

What is needed, therefore, is an explicit theory of the relationship between politics and knowledge. Such an account acts like a frame establishing the limits of the picture of political relevance, allowing us to identify and fill in blank spots, and to locate the different elements in relation to each other and the whole. In short, while there is agreement that the academic and policy worlds are constituted differently (Jackson 2014; Drezner 2014), we can only decide whether this gap is 'pathological' (Drezner 2014) if we establish the *nature* of their relationship.

Theorizing the relationship between politics and knowledge

Politics and knowledge are subject to historical change. Investigating the political relevance of IR - a modern academic discipline - thus requires an account of the relationship between modern knowledge and politics. Such reflections can be found across all disciplines and approaches: in the philosophy of science (Popper 2011; Kuhn 1996; Lakatos and Musgrave 1970), in sociology (Weber 1948; Durkheim 1997; Mannheim 1960; Eisenstadt 2003), in political economy and history (Marx and Engels 1978; Hobsbawm 1962; Arrighi 1994), in linguistics, philosophy and political theory (Nietzsche 1982; Adorno and Horkheimer 1988; Arendt 1973; Bauman 1991; Mignolo 2003) - as well as in IR itself (Morgenthau 1946; Wallerstein 2001; Walker 1993, 2010; Keohane 1988; Lake 2013; Levine 2012; Williams 2013; Oren 2015:394; Sjoberg 2015:397), to mention but a few.

But it is Michel Foucault's archeology of knowledge (1970, 1972) that most directly addresses the core needs of this study. First, by focusing on the epistemic foundations of knowledge, Foucault explicitly abstracts from linking substantive knowledge to concrete policies and provides instead a general account of the relationship between modern knowledge and politics - and hence a theoretical framework that complements the empirical forms of political relevance identified in the IR debate. Second, by elaborating the structure of the modern episteme in detail, Foucault offers an account of the dynamic development of the modern sciences - and hence of the relations between different forms of knowledge.[3]

Foucault shows that all substantive knowledge rests on a deeper layer: the episteme. The episteme describes a particular way of 'ordering things', a 'structure of thought', that is 'common to all branches of knowledge' and that 'men in a particular period cannot escape' (1972:191; 1970:xxi). The archeological approach excavates that epistemic layer in order to identify the type of knowledge to which it gives rise. This focus on the internal dynamics of the episteme, critics argued, could not account for change and Foucault himself subsequently turned to genealogy and governmentality. Yet, by locating epistemic ruptures in particular historical contexts, time and change play an integral role in the archeology of knowledge (Michon 2002:165-9). In fact, these ruptures, I will now suggest, are intimately connected to general political crises.

Foucault describes three epistemes, the first underpinned Renaissance knowledge in the 16th century. While the meaning of such historical periods is essentially contested, the Renaissance is nevertheless widely associated with the development of new ways of thinking - fed by the rediscovery of ancient Greek texts and the 'discovery' of America and its inhabitants that fundamentally challenged the conventional Christian world view (Wright 2008:114; Jahn 2000:51-71). Europeans thus had to account for these 'new' lands and people and to reconstitute a privileged Christian world view that justified colonial conquest (Woolf 2011:234-5; Mignolo 2003: xi; Toulmin 1990:28). Knowledge production during that period thus took the

[3] For a comparison between the sociology, history, and philosophy of knowledge on the one hand and the archeology of knowledge on the other, see Foucault (1972:192, 206).

form of empirical observation with the aim to uncover similarities that linked one thing to the next, ultimately making up the whole of creation, and thus revealing the will of God (Foucault 1970:30-34).

The Thirty Years Wars mark the end of this episteme. The 'unprecedented scale' and 'ferocity' of these wars consumed Europe (Mackenney 1993:120) and led to an overriding need to reestablish political order. Yet the wars ended without a victor that could impose their particular vision. The unity of the Church, intellectually and institutionally, had broken apart (Delanty 1995:67). Economically, merchants and urban elites were on the rise while the landed nobility lost influence. The search for new and reliable foundations of political order thus gave rise to an exceptionally rich period of political thought in European history - from the 17th century and Locke to the Englightenment and the Idèologues (Toulmin 1990:156; Heilbron 2008:40; Foucault 1970:71).

In contrast to their humanist predecessors, these new visions of political order were explicitly developed by abstracting from empirical observation and practice (Toulmin 1990:20, 107) and guided by the need to establish 'the universality of truth, the essential unity of humanity and the redemptive idea of history' (Delanty 1995:68-9). Hence, the classical episteme 'proceeded to the ordering of its material by the establishment of differences' and the introduction of a first and abstract formal principle that would 'create a path leading necessarily from the very simplest and most evident of ideas to the most composite truths' (Foucault 1970:346). In political thought, these self-evident ideas were contained in assumptions about the 'state of nature' from which the laws, practices and institutions necessary to maintain this feature were then logically derived (see, for example, Locke 1994:269; Foucault 1970:329; Toulmin 1990:103).

This classical episteme, or 'science of order', was undermined by the general political crisis at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century which was characterized by tensions between the rich and the poor, politically free and politicially oppressed, town and country, agriculture and manufacture, domestic and international politics, colonized and colonizers, state and state (Jahn 2013:62-7). These tensions eventually led to the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions and

to the fragmentation of empires - particularly in North and South America (Armitage 2013:215, 226-230; Woolf 2011:346). In light of these powerful forces of fragmentation, just like the political sphere, 'the epistemological field became fragmented, or rather exploded in different directions' (Foucault 1970:346, 220-1) and led to the development of a new episteme that underpins the modern[4] sciences.

This modern episteme, above all, makes sense of and reproduces fragmentation. It endowes individual fragments with an internal functional coherence. Now, knowledge is concerned with 'the interior time of an organic structure which grows in accordance with its own necessity and develops in accordance with autochthonous laws' (Foucault 1970:226, 265). Yet, by endowing individual phenomena with their own internal nature, the modern episteme severs the relations between these elements - they are not any longer part of the same space, subject to the same pressures, operating according to the same laws - and thus constitutes 'new sciences and techniques with unprecedented objects' (Foucault 1970:253; Ross 2008:205). Where natural history had been concerned with establishing relations between different species and thus providing a conception of nature as a whole, the modern discipline of biology analyses the internal functions of particular species; where classical political economy had been concerned with the political means necessary or available to increase wealth, the modern discipline of economics analyses the internal relations between labour, time, resources, technology that lead to the production of wealth (Foucault 1970:226).

This brief sketch of epistemic developments in Europe suggests that there exists a connection between politics and knowledge at the epistemic level. First, epistemic ruptures seem to occur in the context of *general* political crises. Second, new epistemes, new *ways* of thinking, appear to address core challenges arising from these crises: the problem of diversity in the 16th century, the quest for order in the 17th century, and the problem of fragmentation at the end of the 18th century.

[4] I use the term 'modern' in the descriptive sense in which it occurs in Foucault's archeology of knowledge where it distinguishes the modern from prior European epistemes without connoting the superiority of the former over the latter, or over non-European forms of knowledge.

The assumption of a link between politics and knowledge at the epistemic level has significant implications for the conceptualization of political relevance. By identifying different levels of knowledge and linking each of these directly to the political context, it suggests that political relevance can take different forms at different levels of knowledge production. And yet, since each of these levels also plays a constitutive role for the others and for the conception of knowledge as such, each constitutes an indispensable dimension of political relevance. This theoretical framework, in other words, encompasses and integrates, rather than to juxtapose, different dimensions of political relevance.

Metatheory and the constitution of modern politics

The first dimension of political relevance is the one most widely overlooked in the contemporary debate on theory and practice. It arises from the co-constitutive relationship between politics and knowledge at the epistemic level and is embodied in the abstract metatheoretical and methodological reflections and practices of the modern sciences - including in IR. These practices, I will show, provide the common basis of the modern conception of politics and of science. Metatheoretical debates are thus indispensable for the modern sciences, and hence preclude an 'end of theory'. Yet, contrary to widely held assumptions, metatheoretical debates are also directly concerned with and driven by the political dimension of the modern sciences.

The modern episteme conjures up a picture of the world made up of a myriad of different phenomena, all with their own internal logics and histories, rubbing up against each other. It thus naturalizes the fragmentation of society and explains disfunctionalities and tensions as the result of the diverse nature of, and developmental differentials between, these elements. On the basis of this 'world view' (Foucault 1972:191), the core task of politics lies in overcoming these frictions, in constructing a coherent and smoothly functioning society. Whereas the classical episteme had conceived political order as a logical system already present in nature and thus located its utopia in the past, the modern episteme conceives political order as a project to be realized and thus locates its utopia in the future (Foucault 1970:263; Picon 2008:73).

This difference has profound practical implications. Under the classical episteme, politics consisted in the implementation of the 'right' political order and political struggles took the form of pitching different conceptions of political order against each other (Toulmin 1990:120). In contrast, the core task of modern politics consists in the manipulation, engineering, management, and administration of disfunctional elements in nature, populations and economies with the goal of turning them, in time, into smoothly functioning parts of a cohesive whole. Political contest does not any longer concern the substance of that political goal but revolves around the most promising and efficient way of achieving it. The modern episteme, in other words, depoliticizes the tensions of a fragmented society and turns them into technical, educational, pastoral, economic, social, cultural problems (Porter 2008:15; Heilbron 2008:51; Turner 2008:63; Picon 2008:71; Revel 2008:395).

Finally, while the exercise of political power in the classical context was authorized with reference to God or nature as the source of universal law, by breaking nature up into a myriad of natures, the modern episteme undermines that source of legitimacy. The only common ground that subsequently exists is the idea of universal reason - the belief that reason can in principle be applied to, and reveal the logic of, all things (Weber 1948:139). This idea of universal reason thus holds the promise of counteracting fragmentation and brings the utopia of a cohesive society into the realm of the possible (Ross 2008:208-9, 214) - and it authorizes the wielding of political power in the common or general, rather than in particular, interests.

The modern episteme thus constitutes the modern conception of politics - and it does so through the separation of politics and knowledge (Ross 2008:208-9). In practice, this labour of separation takes the form of metatheoretical and methodological debates, reflections, and practices. These scientific practices are designed to reduce biases rooted in the fact that reason inheres in, and is wielded by, individuals whose particular political or economic interests, cultural biases, emotions, locations in time and space, constantly challenge its universal aspirations. The most foundational practices of modern science thus consist in separating reason from the particularities in which it is embedded - in striving towards universality through a continuous

process of abstraction.[5] The most profound political relevance of modern science, hence, lies precisely in the development and maintenance of the gap between politics and knowledge through metatheoretical and methodological reflections and practices. This gap underpins political relevance in two different ways.

The first consists in the direct support it provides for the modern notion of politics. At the turn of the 19th century, the social and political upheavals forced liberal elites (who by then had moved to the center of politics) to wield power in order to prevent the ultimate fragmentation of society, but they could not justify such power politics with reference to the very authorities - God's law, a divine order, tradition - against which liberalism had constituted itself. The modern episteme provided an answer to all dimensions of this conundrum: it presented fragmentation as natural; it turned the substantive norms of liberalism into a realistic future goal; and it provided the exercise of power with a new form of authority. Science provided the means to ward off social chaos (Picon 2008:71, 74; Farr 2008:309); it served to 'vindicate human freedom and subject it to standards of reason' (Porter 2008:17, 24).[6] Achieving this political goal, however, required the separation of reason from politics and hence the first, and most direct, political function of abstraction.

Historically, this separation was institutionalized in the development of the modern University in the course of the 19th century. The latter was established and financed by states, yet provided with academic freedom to pursue knowledge in accordance with the logic of reason rather than in the service of particular political interests (Bastow et al. 2014:16-7, 141). Just as the University thus embodies the paradoxical nature of the relationship between politics and knowledge - intimacy through separation - political actors and scholars continuously struggle to find a balance between the two (Bastow et al. 2014:143). The result of this struggle is the

[5] This may well explain the widely held perception that the gap between theory and practice is growing - since every step towards abstraction is soon undermined by the recognition of an even deeper layer at which politics and knowledge, the particular and the universal, are co-constitutive and thus requires a further step of abstraction.

[6] This affinity between liberal forces and the development of the modern sciences might throw some light on the curious preponderance of 'Democratic' over 'Republican' scholars in the US academy (Nau 2008:643).

establishment of a diverse range of knowledge producing institutions at varying degrees of distance from politics. The role of such institutions differs from one context to another, with some think tanks, for example, being highly regarded. In other cases, however, it is precisely the closeness to politics, the 'bias provided by their founders and funders', that has the potential to undermine the general political value of their output and, conversely, the distance from politics that can validate work emanating from universities (Nye 2008:656; Bastow et al. 2014:25, 142).

By the same token, businesses can and do use the association with academic research and institutions, irrespective of any specific content, to convey the notion that their products and brands serve a more general interest rather than only that of their shareholders (Bastow et al. 2014:125-6, 137). Similarly, the association with academic research allows political actors to distance themselves from particular interests. Government officials can benefit from being associated with 'known' academic figures or institutions - even when they are not at all interested in the content of the latter's research - and they sometimes need to be seen to commission research equitably (Bastow et al. 2014:144-5, 163-4). Academic research also provides credibility for civil society actors whom it can protect against the suspicion of vested interests (Bastow et al. 2014:191). These examples demonstrate, in short, that science as such - constituted through practices of abstraction - can provide social and political authority in the modern world.

IR scholars contribute to this development of a universal language of reason through their metatheoretical reflections and methodological practices - and hence to the constitution and reproduction of the modern form of politics itself. Crucially, this does not require the belief in substantive utopias. The tragic work of the classical realist contributes to this type of political relevance as much as that of the humble positivist: the use of scientific methods, however limited in their application or goals, reproduces the idea of universal reason, the idea that 'one can, in principle, master all things by calculation' (Weber 1948:139). Hence, while Morgenthau rejects the idea of a substantive utopia ('moral principles can never be fully realized'), he provides the basis for universal reason by arguing that 'politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau 1985:3-4). Similarly, though explicitly recognizing the limitations of scientific knowledge,

Moravcsik nevertheless endorses the ideal 'that we can in principle communicate objective theories and results to everyone' as the basis for modest 'first steps on the road to utopia' (Moravcsik 2010:131, 136). It is in this sense, and at the epistemic level, that modern 'scientific work is chained to the course of progress' (Weber 1948:137).

The second politically relevant function of this abstraction arises indirectly through its constitution of modern scientific forms of knowledge. This scientific nature of knowledge provides a peculiar validation of concrete claims advanced by scientific studies. Indeed, it is the practice of abstraction - embodied in numbers, formulae, models, scientific languages - that establishes the political power of specific academic disciplines and studies (see also Desch 2015:382). Within the academic context, such numbers and models are highly contested, but taken outside that context these abstractions establish a sense of factuality, of irrefutability - of policies formulated in response to and addressing *the nature of* things. Hence, the formal modeling that is widely employed in economics and quite incomprehensible to non-specialists is nevertheless highly valued by political actors and establishes 'economics envy' amongst academics (Hoffmann 2006:4). But the influence of economics is not due to its successful policy guiding record. On the contrary, economic theories and models continue to be used despite their 'political' failures (Madrick 2014; Morgan 2008:305; see also Paul Krugmann's columns in the New York Times). Instead, economics became influential after it transformed itself, in the first part of the 20th century, into a tool-based discipline - tools that made it possible to sell highly reductionist and partial insights and claims as universal and technical (i.e. apolitical) truths (Morgan 2008:277, 301; Fourcade, Ollion and Algan 2014:23). The abstract language of science authorizes political power in the same way as the, for the wider public, often unintelligible language of religion (Latin, Sanscrit, Arabic) does.

These practices establish the political value of more substantive theories and analyses by providing them with scientific validation, sometimes depicted as a 'trickle down' process (Desch 2015:385). The political impact of the democratic peace thesis provides a good example. Its core claim - that democracies don't fight each other - is perfectly intelligible and gained political influence partly because it served the interests of and was 'welcomed by many policy makers'. It did, however, not

successfully guide political action. The source of its 'power' and resilience, as Frieden and Lake point out (2005:142, 143), lay in its 'scientific' nature - in the fact that its core claim was presented in the form of numbers, figures, that appeared in the political context as 'fact' or 'empirical law'. The same claim expressed by journalists on op-ed pages, in contrast, would have qualified as no more than an opinion without the comparable power to justify policies.

Elaborating the political relevance of metatheoretical and methodological work makes sense of some of the puzzles and contradictions identified in the current debate. It explains why practicioners find abstract theoretical and methodological work - specifically formal modeling, large-n studies, complex statistical analysis, game theory, most quantitative studies - decidedly useless for policy making but nevertheless expect and tolerate such work in some fields like economics and statistics or even reinforce it in political science (Avey and Desch 2014:232, 241; Oren 2015:394). It also suggests that policymakers frequently associate themselves with academic research and institutions not because they are useful in formulating particular policies but because they provide the only universal language that can validate politics in the common or general interest (Avey and Desch 2014:238). Conversely, the lack of scientific validation may well explain why policymakers 'shy away' from the use of the internet (Avey and Desch 2014:245).

Moreover, reconstructing the relationship between politics and knowledge calls for a reassessment of metatheoretical and methodological practices in the modern sciences. It highlights, first, their indispensable nature. While methodological practices like 'simplistic hypothesis testing' (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013:427) may not contribute directly to the explanation of particular political problems, they play a crucial role in the reproduction of IR as a modern science. And while individual scholars may well advocate a turn away from metatheoretical debates and towards engagement with more concrete issues of international politics (Kurki 2011; Edkins and Zehfuss 2009:xxxii; Lake 2013:567), that work nevertheless rests on metatheoretical commitments and methodological practices from which it receives its scientific status and validation (Reus-Smit 2013:589). Abandoning active engagement with that level of scientific work thus simply amounts to the acceptance of 'an established tradition' (Dunne et al. 2013:418).

Second, identifying the separation of politics and knowledge as the core function of metatheoretical debates suggests that historical fluctuations - the ups and downs of such debates - do not indicate an 'end of theory'. Instead, they reflect the paradoxical foundations of the modern sciences, the necessity to abstract from the particularity of politics and the ultimate impossibility of this task. Such debates arise when established metatheoretical and methodological commitments are seen to be vulnerable to particular political interests: when, for example, the ontological commitments of liberal IR scholars during the inter-war period were held responsible for the 'political' failure of their work (Williams 2013:648); when the methodological commitments of 'traditional' approaches during the 1960s were accused of being vulnerable to abuse by totalizing ideologies (Biersteker 1989:266); or when the epistemological commitments of positivism in the 1990s were considered complicit in underpinning a violent and unjust world order (Ashley and Walker 1990:265, 260, 262). The purpose of such debates is to free scientific knowledge of these links to particular political projects through the development of new metatheoretical grounds and methodological tools with the aim to maintain or strengthen the wider political relevance of scientific knowledge - and they subside when such grounds gain acceptance (replacing, or coexisting with, older ones). The historical fluctuation of metatheoretical debates is therefore an integral part of the dynamic development of the modern sciences. Above all, far from constituting other-worldly concerns of 'monks' in 'ivory towers' (Wallace 1996), metatheoretical debates aim to ensure the 'worldly' relevance of the modern sciences.

Metatheoretical and methodological reflections thus play a foundational role both for the modern conception of politics and that of science. By establishing the possibility of universal reason, they directly authorize the exercise of power in accordance with that reason - and hence in the common rather than particular interests. By the same token, these practices provide all academic work with scientific validation and hence the peculiar form of political relevance of the modern sciences. In contrast to widespread assumptions, moreover, metatheoretical debates are driven by and directly address the political dimension of the modern sciences.

Theory and the constitution of political spaces

The second dimension of political relevance arises from the way in which the modern episteme structures, or more specifically fragments, the field of knowledge itself - which leads to the establishment of new and ever changing fields of study and governs the dynamic relations within and between them. Locating IR within this context shows that the 'fragmentation', 'poverty', and 'immaturity' of the discipline has its roots in the modern episteme itself and is thus a common feature of the modern sciences. Within the context of the modern sciences, however, these widely deplored features of the discipline ensure the progressive development of theories. These theories, I will show, constitute political spaces and are thus politically highly relevant.

With the development of the modern episteme, existing fields of knowledge such as natural history, political economy or grammar disintegrated into a range of new scientific fields, into the modern sciences of biology, economics, politics, literature and so on. Yet, by defining 'things' according to their internal coherence, the modern episteme isolates them from each other (Foucault 1970:xxiii) and thus opens up fundamental gaps in the field of knowledge. While biology, for instance, conceptualized the life of animals in terms of their internal organic functions, it failed to account for their external relations, for the fact that it was '*necessary* that the animal should feed itself' (Foucault 1970:266). Grasping that relationship then required the constitution of a new field with its own internal logic. The modern sciences thus constitute 'partial totalities, totalities that turn out to be limited by fact, totalities whose frontiers can be made to move, up to a certain point, but which will never extend into the space of a definitive analysis, and will never raise themselves to the status of absolute totality' (Foucault 1970:373). Ironically, it is the attempt to address the limits of this modern form of knowledge that leads to a proliferation of new fields of study, each characterized by 'poverty' and internal fragmentation.

The modern discipline of economics, as mentioned above, developed during the 19th century largely by shedding the 'moral philosophical', 'political' and 'sociological' dimensions that had been part and parcel of political economy (Morgan 2008:278). Moreover, the new discipline of economics was driven by theoretical concerns, by a focus on efficiency and the ideal economy that left practical economic issues - such as equity - unanswered and unaddressed (Schabas 2008:182; Morgan 2008:297, 305;

Bannister 2008:335, 336). The new discipline of politics, meanwhile, was concerned with government - but governments at the time did not consider the management of the economy as one of their tasks (Schabas 2008:182). Hence, neither politics nor economics was in a position to analyze the fundamental problems created at their interface and thus failed, for example, to address the economic crisis of the 1870s and its political fall-out (Morgan 2008:297, 305). This failure in turn provided the opening for the establishment of sociology - a science that posited 'society' as a separate sphere between politics and economics (Bannister 2008:329).

The emergence of IR as a separate field of study follows the same logic - of filling a space that is left unaddressed by other disciplines. Just as the newly established discipline of politics focused on the internal logic of government (Farr 2008:309), neither economics, sociology, history, or law were conceived in such a way as to include the nevertheless pressing issues of the external relations of states (Long and Schmidt 2005). IR, in other words, owes its existence to the 'poverty' of the subject matter of older disciplines. Yet, by establishing the internal logic of relations between states, IR in turn contributes to the separation of this field from others.

This dynamic of fragmentation does not stop at the borders of disciplines but defines their internal development through the relentless process of 'specialization' (Weber 1948:134). The modern discipline of history, for instance, is divided into national history, social history, world history, art history, the history of ideas, of agriculture, of germs and so on (Revel 2008:402). In IR, this process of specialization finds institutional expression in the 28, and rising, sections of the International Studies Association (ISA). The modern episteme thus leads to the dynamic development of new fields of knowledge, to the constant conceptualization of new issue areas in answer to the 'poverty', the limits of 'ordering things' in terms of internal functionality. Indeed, the structure of the modern field of knowledge is utterly familiar to IR scholars: it is characterized by 'internal hierarchy' and external 'coexistence' (Foucault 1970:265).

This constitution of new fields of knowledge, moreover, leads to the methodological fragmentation of the modern sciences. Once individual phenomena have been endowed with their own internal logic, each of these logics requires appropriate

methods for their analysis. Hence, historians in the 19th century triggered the most fundamental of these divides, that between the natural and social sciences, by arguing that nature and history were driven by entirely different internal logics and their analysis hence required fundamentally different tools (Wright 2008:117, 119). The historicist principle embedded within the modern episteme thus led to the dynamic development of a huge variety of methodologies designed to study particular phenomena (Revel 2008:403; Wright 2008:114) and in some cases, like geography, split entire disciplines into 'natural' and 'social' parts (Robic 2008:384-5).

This fragmentation was seen very early on as a major obstacle - both intellectually and politically - since it led to ever smaller units of investigation and hence also diminishing returns in terms of the reach of explanations and their practical relevance (Ross 2008:227). Yet, attempts to address this substantive and methodological fragmentation only generated new divisions, this time between theorists and specialists. While specialists carve out and investigate the internal dynamics of ever smaller pieces of the puzzle, generalists attempt to theorize the relations between these individual pieces.

Yet, the quest of theorists to reestablish connections between previously separated phenomena cannot help but generate its own form of fragmentation. Since the methodological tools available within a given field are designed to establish its internal logic, they do not lend themselves to linking that field with others. In order to establish such links, therefore, modern scientists borrow tools - concepts, metaphors, methods, theoretical approaches - from other disciplines (Foucault 1970:357-8) leading to the fragmentation of the modern sciences along theoretical/methodological lines (Ross 2008:235).

Correlation and regression, for example, were methods originally designed for biometric data and then adapted for the social sciences, especially economics (Morgan 2008:282-3); game theory developed in economics and was then exported to evolutionary biology and political science - including international relations (Morgan 2008:300); in sociology we find organic/evolutionist, statistical, and philosophical approaches (Bannister 2008:333, 334, 343); in anthropology functionalist, organic, linguistic, economic approaches (Kuper 2008:363, 372, 373, 374). History borrowed

from geography, economics, sociology and anthropology and supplied the social sciences in turn with empirical material (Revel 2008:403, 397-8).

This dynamic also accounts for the plurality of theoretical approaches within IR (Dunne et al. 2013:407-12). The analysis of the field was right from the start undertaken through tools - concepts, theoretical approaches, methodologies - borrowed from other disciplines, originally political science, law, history and philosophy. These approaches were later, especially in the US, challenged and more positivist methods introduced. Economic modeling, game theory, hypothesis testing all originate in other disciplines. More recently, the number of theoretical and methodological approaches borrowed from other disciplines has multiplied even further. Normative IR theory borrows from analytical philosophy, postcolonial approaches from cultural theory, international political economy is informed by economic and sociological approaches, poststructuralism borrows from linguistic theory.

Yet, while individual disciplines adopt different approaches, none of them manages to overcome the limitations generated by the modern way of 'ordering things'. In contrast to IR, economics is often seen as enjoying a common conception of a rich subject matter and highly developed and mature tools of investigation. And yet, as we have seen, economics emerged from classical political economy by shedding its 'political' dimension and it responded to the limitations of its subsequently impoverished internalist logic by narrowing the remit of the discipline even further; by excluding issues, methods, approaches that its core assumption of a rational economic agent could not accomodate (Morgan 2008:300; Fourcade et al. 2014). Economics thus, indeed, managed to retain a higher degree of intellectual unity and coherence than many other social sciences. But this relative internal coherence is achieved at the high price of an increasingly narrow definition of the discipline and a correspondingly limited relevance of its output (Morgan 2008:297, 305; Bannister 2008:335, 336). Moreover, this sacrifice ultimately does not protect economics from the fragmentary dynamics of the modern episteme. The discipline is divided into macro- and microeconomics as well as other specializations and has been unable to overcome their separation (Morgan 2008:295, 278).

Moreover, the 'maturity' of a particular field of study does not enhance its capacity to address this dilemma. The dynamics of fragmentation generated by the modern episteme undermine the notion of science as a 'cumulative' or 'evolutionary' enterprise (Nau 2008:640-1; Frieden and Lake 2005:137, 145). While it certainly leads to increasingly complex and sophisticated conceptions of particular parts of the whole as well as to new ways of dividing that whole, of creating 'partial totalities', it nevertheless reproduces the core problem generated by the modern episteme: its inability to generate a conception of the whole itself.

This brief sketch of the intra-academic dynamics of the modern episteme shows, first, that the characteristics often identified with IR - fragmentation, poverty, immaturity - and linked to its political potential are generated by the modern episteme and thus shared by all modern sciences. Second, though there exist differences in the degree to which individual disciplines exhibit these characteristics, they do not establish a hierarchy between them because the relationship between the richness of a discipline's subject matter and its internal coherence takes the form of a trade-off - with improvements in one necessarily leading to the deterioration of the other (Ross 2008:225, 235).

Third, this analysis calls for a reassessment of theoretical fragmentation. Fragmentation is an expression of the inability of the modern sciences to produce a conception of the whole - and IR scholars are thus correct to identify it as a problem (Holsti 1985; Sylvester 2013). The source of this problem, however, does not lie in the choices of IR scholars who 'embrace' fragmentation instead of working 'towards a more coherent view of global processes' (Dunne et al. 2013:416). Nor is it the complexity of society that makes 'theoretical pluralism (...) necessary' (Dunne et al. 2013:417). Though 'all human systems' are complex, this has not always led to the fragmentation that characterizes the modern sciences. Rather, it is the modern episteme that endows the individual elements of such complex systems with their own internal nature and hence leads to fragmentation.

While fragmentation is thus an integral feature of the modern sciences and constitutes a limitation, within this context it is by no means a barrier to knowledge production. On the contrary, it is precisely the dynamic of fragmentation that continuously

motivates scholars to bridge gaps, link separate phenomena, and thus leads to theoretical pluralism. Hence, 'progress' in the context of the modern sciences consists less in 'cumulation' and more in 'diversification' (compare also Jackson and Nexon 2009:926). The pluralism of IR thus indicates a healthy and dynamic modern discipline.

Crucially, however, this does not render the modern sciences politically irrelevant. On the contrary, it is precisely this separation of distinct areas of knowledge and their subsequent theorization that constitutes concrete fields for political intervention. Much of the systematic social policies of modern states relies on the theorization of society and its internal dynamics by the 'new' discipline of sociology (Bannister 2008:329; see also Owens 2015 for the importance of social theory in international politics). Similarly, the development of statistics and the collection of statistical data provided nongovernmental groups and women with an opportunity for political involvement, and census questions, in India for example, constituted caste distinctions, rivalries, and policies (Yeo 2008:88, 97, 92).

IR contributes such politically relevant theories at all levels. General theories of international relations inform the work of IR scholars appointed to government office in the US, for example (Kissinger, Albright, Rice, Kirkpatrick; see also Nye 2008:656-7). Their influence, however, is not restricted to a few professors that have the 'ear of the prince' but extend into all areas of society (Vitalis 2015:3-4). Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis was not only known to policy makers (Avey and Desch 2014:233) and forced particularly the US government to constantly and explicitly disavow its rationale but has also influenced public political debate. Similarly, deterrence theory established a logic for the nuclear stand-off during the Cold War, yet not on the basis of evidence or properties inherent in nuclear weapons. Rather, it developed an 'entirely theoretical' logic that was then used, and contested, by political actors (Frieden and Lake 2005:141; Cohn 1987). More recently, globalization theory, with major contributions from IR scholars, has played a tremendously important political role conditioning 'the possibility of thought and action' (Bartelson 2000:181). The term globalization provided a crucial reference point for public political debates, indicated by its skyrocketing use in newspapers, magazines and reports worldwide (Chanda 2007:246). Powerful actors presented

globalization's 'inexorable logic' as a new justification for their policies (Clinton 1999 cited in Steger 2009:170) while the fight against this 'logic' gave rise to new political actors and struggles, like the anti-globalization movement (Steger 2009:202-4; Hoogvelt 2001). Projects to regulate, deregulate, securitize, legalize, democratize a global space significantly differ from similar aims pursued in a national or international context.

The political relevance of substantive IR theories, as these examples show, does not rest on their quality or their (successful or faithful) uptake by political actors. In contrast to a narrow conception of *policy* relevance, it is precisely because such theories often do not entail any explicit 'policy advice' but constitute spaces for political action - 'a broader context', 'frameworks for making sense of the world' (Avey and Desch 2014:238, 244, 228; Bastow et al. 2014: 22, 28, 167, 273; Eriksson 2014:101; Bertucci et al. 2014:61; Voeten 2015:402) - that they are attractive to political actors who are free to ignore or occupy that field, interpret its meaning, align their particular interests and projects to it.

The fragmentary nature of the modern episteme, I have argued, leads to the dynamic production of theories that simultaneously link particular phenomena and separate them from their context. By constantly carving up the field in new ways, individual theories reinterpret existing political spaces, providing political actors with new ways of understanding political problems, new ways of justifying old policies, and the opportunity to adjust old or develop new political projects and practices. Inasmuch as this process leads to theoretical pluralism, it also provides the basis for political pluralism.

Policy studies and their impact on political practice

The third dimension of political relevance finds expression in the policy oriented studies that are so widely associated with the term. Such studies can indeed 'bridge the gap' between politics and knowledge at the concrete level. I will argue, however, that successfully crossing this politics-knowledge divide imposes limits on policy oriented studies. Yet, empirical studies constitute an integral dimension of modern science and it is this scientific standing that provides them with a wider *political* relevance. Abandoning theory and metatheory in favor of empirical studies, as widely

called for by the 'gap-bridgers', would thus undermine their scientific basis and hence also their political potential.

While the modern sciences are linked to politics at the level of the episteme, they are also inspired by concrete and substantive problems (Foucault 1970:345) and, in turn, shape specific policies. Hence, the need to address the living conditions of the poor at the turn of the 19th century led to the development of social and population surveys (Yeo 2008:87) that played a crucial role in the establishment of statistics as a modern science. Similarly, geography and history helped counteract the fragmentary dynamics of society by providing a unifying narrative of the historical development of the nation and its link to territory - which was directly fed into primary and secondary education (Robic 2008:380; Wright 2008:123). Geography also contributed to colonialism; geographers were widely used by the US State Department during World War (WW) II (Robic 2008:380-2, 387); and economists were employed to design bombing raids (Morgan 2008:296). Similarly, early 'IR' scholars, were motivated by the need to administer newly aquired colonial territories (US), to retain their hold on older colonial possessions (Britain), and by fear of resistance to white supremacy domestically and internationally - and their 'expertise' on these issues was variously fed into public and political debates as well as policies (Vitalis 2015; Bell 2014).

However, while politics and knowledge are inextricably linked at the epistemic level, the gap between them widens with every step towards concrete issues - establishing the relative autonomy, and separate 'vocations', of politics and science (see also Hamati-Ataya 2012:632; Eagleton-Pierce 2011). This autonomy finds expression in the fact that modern academic disciplines are not necessarily concerned with concrete political issues. Hence, during the 19th century, the discipline of economics was driven not by practical but by philosophical problems (Schabas 2008:172, 182), just as anthropology was not directly concerned with concrete policies (Kuper 2008:355) and much of IR scholarship today is, as widely noted, not concerned with concrete political issues (Sylvester 2013; Kurki 2011; Turton 2015:399).

This autonomy of science and politics is, however, constantly undermined by their co-constitutive relationship at the epistemic level. Political actors have an interest in harnessing the constitutive role of scientific knowledge for politics at large also for

their particular policies. Hence, they try to cajole, usually through funding policies, academia into doing their bidding. Such policies can take a variety of forms in different contexts and at different times (Turton 2015:400). The threat to cut political science funding in the US (Desch 2015:379) and the impact agenda that ties research funding to policy relevance in the UK (Bastow et al. 2014:144) are but two examples. Such higher education policies play a role in shaping academia, in establishing different conceptions of economics, for example, in the US, the UK, and France (Fourcade 2009) or in marginalizing critical approaches to IR in the US (Oren 2003, 2015:394). However, the influence of political actors on academia has its limits. While societal pressures and higher education policies shape fields of study in general, they do not have the power to force individual scholars to investigate particular problems in specific ways - thus providing an opening, for example, for critical approaches even in the US (Elshtain 1995; Weber 1994; Tickner 1993; Enloe 2001; Wood 2003; Wallerstein 2004; Doty 1996; Biswas 2001; Ling 2002; Chowdry and Nair 2002; Inayatullah and Blaney 2004; Krishna 2009; DerDerian and Shapiro 1989).

Conversely, the modern sciences were ultimately established in order to serve social and political needs. Academics, therefore, do not just require funding for their work but are widely interested in the realization of its social and political potential. For this reason, academic knowledge is made public as a matter of course - through publication and teaching. But bridging the gap at the level of concrete policies requires precisely those efforts the 'gap-bridgers' rightly identify: focusing on pressing political problems, communicating scientific findings in plain language, targeting relevant audiences, establishing institutional links to political actors - and even to undertake special training for these purposes (Jentleson 2002:170; Kurki 2011:131; Sylvester 2013:615; Scocpol et al. 2014; Nye 2008:655).

Such efforts can be successful. Despite its original disinterest in practical politics, for example, during the 20th century the discipline of economics split between the science of political economy and the art of economic governance with the latter aiming to produce adaptive economic behavior, highlight paths to development, and design institutions that foster market economies (Morgan 2008:289, 277). Anthropology, similarly, began to convince governments during the 1930s that it was

useful for their colonial projects and war efforts (Kuper 2008:369). And yet, while academic work has an impact on politics in general, political actors are free to ignore particular studies - even if the latter have useful and intelligible things to say about pressing political problems. At the level of concrete policies and specific studies, therefore, neither party has the power to bridge the gap unilaterally (Bastow et al. 2014:103, 163, 198). And where academic studies do inform concrete policies, academics lack the means to control the political uses or consequences of their work.

The attempt to overcome these limitations, in turn, curtails the political relevance of policy oriented studies in qualitative and quantitative terms (Bastow et al. 2014:63, 103). In pursuit of policy impact, academic studies need to respond to the concerns and interests of particular political actors and this in turn shapes the contents and methods developed by the sciences. Statistics, for example, developed methods based on the 'common man' when the goal was to improve the living conditions of the lower classes, and qualitative methods when it was to defend the ruling elites. Problems of colonial government motivated the collection of population data while international conflict and the need for soldiers generated data on birth rates and health (Yeo 2008:94-5, 90). While such data may have multiple uses, they also have limitations. Hence, workers' movements had to collect their own data on living conditions because those generated by the ruling elites excluded all information on wages and prices (Yeo 2008:89-90). Similarly, the interests of white 'IR' scholars in the US in the early 20th century led (with few exceptions) to fundamentally different explanations of racial and political hierarchies than those of black scholars (Vitalis 2015:48-54). The analysis of particular policies, in short, is by definition particular - limited.

Despite these limitations it is plausible to assume that IR studies frequently cross the politics-academia divide. The attempt of the UK government to systematically measure precisely this type of political impact - academic research leading directly to 'changes and benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment and quality of life' (King's College London and Digital Science 2015:12) - turned up 99 case studies in the fields of Political Science and International Relations ranging from Israeli-Palestinian Water Politics (43954) through EU-China relations (1985), Democracy Promotion (42111), Demobilization Programs (35293), Military Ethics (3681), Nonproliferation (42113), to EU Free

Trade Policies (44004).[7] While the attempt to measure such policy impact is fraught with difficulties (see King's College London and Digital Science 2015:7, 17) and its form and extent may vary from country to country, this exercise shows that the discipline of IR is certainly capable of crossing the gap at the concrete level and in a wide range of issue areas.

Consequently, the perception that IR scholarship lacks *political* relevance may well have its origins not only in the failure to recognize the political relevance of theoretical and metatheoretical work but also in the limited relevance of *policy* oriented studies themselves - in the fact that they tend to address and benefit particular issues and actors and hence, unlike theories, fail to inform the 'grand strategies' of states or provide the 'grand narratives' that frame international politics in particular periods.

And yet, empirical or policy oriented studies can and do have wider *political* relevance derived from their integral role within the modern sciences where metatheoretical, theoretical, and empirical levels of knowledge production are necessarily linked (Hamati-Ataya 2013:682). Theories and metatheories are abstractions from *something* - and policy oriented studies provide the necessary link to that empirical basis. With this link, the reconstruction of modern science comes full circle. Empirical studies not only constitute an integral dimension of the modern sciences, they also apply scientific methods and operate within theoretical frameworks.

This metatheoretical and theoretical basis distinguishes empirical studies from other forms of knowledge about particular political problems - such as the observations of journalists, the reflections of particular actors, the experiences of victims and so on. These types of knowledge regularly inform political actors and hence also their policies. What they lack, however, is the ability to claim that they are anything more than the particular insights of particular actors in a particular time and place. Politics informed only by such knowledge, as Hobbes pointed out in response to religious

[7] The case studies are collected in a searchable data base with the numbers in brackets identifying individual cases (REF 2015).

disintegration in 17th century Europe, constitutes a war 'of every man, against every man' - 'for one man calleth *Wisdome*, what another calleth *feare*; and one *cruelty*, what another *justice*; one *prodigality*, what another *magnanimity*; and one *gravity*, what another *stupidity'* (Hobbes 1991:88, 31; Williams 1996). It is this problem of a world constituted of particularities, an essentially fragmented world, that the modern sciences address by providing the promise of universal reason, by laboring to establish the metatheoretical and theoretical grounds for knowledge that exceeds particular interests and perspectives. On the basis of these grounds, scientific empirical studies aspire to and claim the ability to exceed particular perspectives - to provide accounts of concrete political issues that may serve as a common language or basis for otherwise incommensurable positions. It is only through their metatheoretical and theoretical commitments, therefore, that empirical studies can achieve this wider *political* relevance - that they contribute to turning a war 'of every man against every man' into the possibility of (relative) peace and cooperation.

Empirical studies, in sum, can bridge the gap between politics and knowledge. But they achieve wider political relevance only by virtue of their scientific standing. Marginalizing theoretical and metatheoretical work in favor of policy oriented studies thus undermines their scientific standing and with it also their political relevance.

Conclusion

Politics and knowledge are indeed 'joined at the hip, and neither can succeed, even within its own realm, without the other' (Nau 2008:636). Theorizing this relationship leads to a fuller understanding of the political relevance of IR as well as to a reassessment of core characteristics of the discipline.

In the modern context, I have shown, the intimate linkage between politics and knowledge is established and reproduced through separation. It is only by distancing itself from the particularities of politics and developing the language of universal reason that science establishes its political relevance. This paradoxical relationship turns on its head the widely shared assumption that increasing levels of abstraction - from empirical to theoretical and metatheoretical work - undermine political relevance. Instead, with every step away from concrete policies, academic studies address broader questions, speak to wider audiences, and play a more foundational

role for politics (Eriksson 2014:102). Each of these levels of abstraction, moreover, constitutes an integral part of modern science and therefore also of its political relevance. 'Practically relevant knowledge' is therefore not possible without 'metatheoretical reflection' (Reus-Smit 2013:605) and vice versa.

Locating the discipline of IR within the context of this relationship between politics and knowledge also illuminates the nature and function of some of its core features. It shows that the poverty of its subject matter, its fragmentation, and immaturity arise from the ultimate limitation of modern knowledge - its inability to provide an account of totality - and is therefore common to all modern sciences. Within this context, however, fragmentation does not function as a barrier to, but a driver of, scientific progress in the form of theoretical pluralism. And far from indicating an 'end of theory', the waxing and waning of metatheoretical debates is driven by the political implications and limitations of scientific knowledge.

These dynamics of modern scientific development, in turn, also have political implications. Despite its universalist aspirations, modern knowledge is always partial and can only illuminate norms already embodied *in* given practices rather than generating guiding principles *for* practice (Weber 1948:147). For this reason, the role of IR scholars interested in improving politics cannot be reduced to the 'heroic' one 'of providing scientifically derived knowledge by which foreign policy may be guided', but must fundamentally include 'the "ironic" one of ensuring that rival explanations can be heard' (Zambernardi 2016:4-5).

Theory, in sum, plays a pivotal role for the constitution, reproduction, and progressive development of IR as a modern science. What is more, theory at every level of abstraction plays a constitutive role for the political relevance of modern science in general. And theory, at every level of abstraction, also plays a directly political role. Theory, in short, is both indispensable and highly practical.

Finally, the implications of the present study apply also to its own findings. By focusing on the common epistemic basis of the modern sciences and modern politics, I have been able to establish connections between politics and knowledge, and between IR and other disciplines. This has highlighted the political relevance of

abstract and concrete, good and bad quality, accessible and inaccessible studies. Yet, by focusing on the modern episteme, this study has necessarily abstracted from the ontological dimension - from the specificities of politics and knowledge, the differences between IR and other modern sciences, between abstract and concrete, critical and mainstream, good and bad quality work. The source of the confusion over the relevance of IR, however, has always lain in the epistemic basis of the relation between modern politics and the sciences. And that is what this article has sought to clarify.

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